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ABSTRACT

Perspectives on the skills needed by a college president or executive officer are considered, based on an internship experience with the Chancellor and Director of University Relations at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. The information is directed to students contemplating a doctoral program in higher education administration. Attention is directed to guiding concepts used by executives in decision-making. On an institutional level, it is suggested that a clearly stated and communicated mission is important for daily and long-range operations. Additional institutional concepts include the following: the higher university-wide mission supersedes the mission of lesser units and members of the institution must feel ownership of the mission. Administrative concepts are proposed, including the following: information is power to accomplish a task and the key to cooperation is to assist others so they perceive an active part in decision-making. The following interpersonal and personal concepts are also considered: control and awareness of one's behavior are important in selling ideas and receiving cooperation and behavior needs to be matched to the individual one is dealing with and to the outcome the administrator desires. Brief recommendations for future internships are included. (SW)

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Administration in Higher Education: An Internship Experience

Presented
To

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Director of University Relations
Assistant to the Chancellor

Dr. Olin Kopp
Chairman, Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Dorothy Stevens
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Foreward

I present this paper for those individuals who may never have the opportunity to experience an executive internship before aquiring their first executive office in Higher Education. It is hoped that this report will provide an idea of some of the guiding concepts used by executives when making decisions so that students contemplating a doctoral program in administration of higher education will have an idea of some of the talents, skills and understandings needed to increase their chance of success in an executive position.

These are concepts I perceived as I carried out this internship and therefore are not necessarily comprehensive nor true in every instance. I beleive they are, however, of use as general guides for decision making on an institutional, administrative, interpersonal and personal basis.

Administration in Higher Education: An Internship Experience

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

This paper is presented as a summary report of the results of experiences I participated in during an internship with Dr. Rudy Lewis, Assistant to the ChancelLor and Director of University Relations, The University of Nebraska/Lincoln in the summer of 1983.

The internshhip was suggested by Dr. Stevens, co-chair of my doctoral committee, during a discussion concerning my doctoral plan. In this discussion I mentioned that I was interested in investigating the talents and skills needed to become a college president and she suggested that perhaps an intership could be arranged in the chancellor's office. Through the efforts and cooperation of Dr. Stervens, Dr. Olin Kopp, Chairman,Curriculum and Instruction at UNL and Dr. Rudy Lewis arrangements were made to continue planning the internship, once Dr. Kopp and Dr. Stevens conducted a personal interview to screen for any potential limiting problems.

Following the interview I was assigned to Dr. Lewis's office for the remainder of the internship. Dr. Lewis made arrangements and set up appointments with various university wide administrative staff so that I might have a better understanding of the functions and missions of the various components of the university. Following each of the assignments Dr. Lewis met with me to discuss various questions, explain relationships and debrief me to be sure I was on task and accomplishing the objective for each visit.

Midway through the experience a meeting was arranged with Dr. Kopp, Dr. Stevens Dr. Lewis and myself to disruss progress of the internship.

The meetings continued throughout the remainder of the summer session. Following the internship this concluding report was written and letters of appreciation sent to the various participants and facilitators, thanking them for their assistance.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this internship was to gain experience and investigate the various understandings a college president or executive officer needs to be successful. This would hopefully assist me in pinpointing areas of emphasis as I

continued my doctoral studies. It would also respond to a personal question that I felt I needed to answer before I could committ myself to a career goal. That question is "Do I have the talent and skill necessary to be successful at the executive level, and if not could I acquire them?"

Therefore the purpose of this internship was to answer the broad question, "what skills and talents are needed to be successful in a high level administrative office?"

METHOD OF PRESENTATION

It would be impossible to discuss all of the experiences I have had during this internship. However, as I reflect back on my notes and thoughts I find all of the experiences can be grouped into several larger understandings and when these understandings are grouped they suggest concepts. Therefore, for the purpose of this report, I will state a perceived concept and give an explanation or situation that supports it. These are my perceived concepts and may not be as others see them, or as things really are. They are simply what my experiences during this internship suggest.

PRESENTATION OF CONCEPTS

For simplicity I have broken the various concepts into four major areas based on what they address. These are: Institutional concepts; Administrative concepts; Interpersonal concepts and; Personal concepts.

INSTITUTIONAL CONCEPTS

As I visited the various offices several concepts emerged that seem to be very important to the institution as a whole. These dealt with the mission of the university.

> Concept#1: The university must have a clearly stated and communicated mission that can be used to give direction both on a day to day as well as on a long range basis.

Decisions cannot be made with out a clear idea of why the university exists. Therefore it is very important that each unit of the university has a clear understanding of its particular mission, and how it relates to the university's mission at large.

Without this clear understanding each decision that an administrator would have to make would be little more than a guess, or require that each decision be passed on to the top administrator for final approval, an impossible expectation within a large organization.

This suggests the first and continuing task of a new executive of an organization must be to communicate the organizational mission to his subordinates.

Concept#2: The higher University wide mission supersedes the mission of the lesser units.

In cases where decisions at one level are in direct conflict with a decision at a higher level the decision will be made in favor of the higher level. Each of the persons I visited recalled many times in their career they had to make decisions in direct conflict with their unit mission, but for the good of the university mission they had to decide in favor of the university at large.

One example which seemed to surface in several discussions was that all contacts with newspapers, news media, etc. must be cleared through a central office, even though there didn't seem to be any controversy concerning the topic. Otherwise well thought out media plans in other units could be inadvertently undermined.

Concept#3: Members of the institution must feel ownership of the mission.

Without believing in the mission of the institution it becomes very difficult, possibly even impossible to get the involvement necessary to successfully carry out responsibilities. This means when there is a general disagreement between the stated mission of an institution and the people involved in carrying out its mission, one of two things has to occur. Either a change in the people involved, or a change in mission.

Several people interviewed stated they had worked for the university for several years, but as financial crunches caused changes in the way they carried out their tasks, they were having to make major career change decisions. It was felt that a change in the mission, as they understood it in the past, was being brought to bare by default, rather than by plan. In the next few years they would be faced with developing acceptance of the new mission, or finding another institution which had a mission more in line with their thoughts. Owning the mission was very important to these individuals.

Another of the persons interviewed stated he had been involved for sixteen years in developing a new major on UNL campus. When he was asked to take an administrative post he realized he would not be able to complete development of the new major if he accepted the new position. Before accepting the new position he felt the need to know he could be as involved in the new position. He wanted to own the new mission so he could become involved and not just go through motions.

Concept#4: The quality of the institution can be no better than the quality of its leaders.

Because of the large number of people involved, and the number of responsibilities each person has to carry out, it

becomes necessary to depend on the ability of subordinates to carry out the various delegated tasks. There just isn't enough time to constantly "check out" each task delegated to another person. Therefore it becomes very imortant to the institution to have quality professionals at all levels. Just like a chain, an institution is only as strong as it's weakest link.

For example one of the persons interviewed had twenty people on his immediate staff. When asked how he managed the delegated responsibilities of this large group he stated he had to depend on the staff. As a matter of fact he stated he was not even aware of the various projects being carried out by the different units, but depended on his staff to keep him attuned to any problems, or needs of which he should be aware.

Several of those interviewed stated that many times they have to ask other people to carry out tasks for them, even when formally the person has no obligation to comply.

ADMINISTRATIVE CONCEPTS

Concept#1: Information is power to accomplish tasks.

Keeping others informed, or the lack of others to be informed can be the difference between success or failure in accomplishing a task. Time should be allocated to educate others to ideas and changes before they are implemented so a favorable response will be acquired.

Each of the persons interviewed stated one of their most important responsibilities was their staff meetings, which were usually scheduled weekly, on the same day of the week so each member could reserve the time needed for the meeting. This was the time new ideas were introduced, or staff were educated concerning future happenings.

Concept#2: The key to cooperation is to assist others so they perceive an active part in decision making.

Though there is a formal structure stating who is responsible to who, subordinates must be willing to cooperate. By being sure others perceive an active part in decision making, the administrator assures subordinates will cooperate. This is not to say every decision is one for all to decide, but it does mean others have to perceive participation.

Concept#3: The higher the level of the administrator, the less "assigned", and the more "assumed" responsibility.

Most of the interviewed stated their responsibility was usually described in generalities and it was their task to define them in specifics. What ever was required of them

to carry out their goals they were expected to do it.

For example starting with zero funding, administer the continuing education program which has a seven million dollar budget.

Concept#4: The time to decide whether a person can be delegated a responsibility is when you hire the person.

Because of the amount and nature of work at the executive level, it is important to be able to delegate responsibilities to others on your staff. The time to decide whether someone can handle delegated responsibility is when they are hired, not after. Otherwise you cannot completely separate your concern over a delegated responsibility. In essence, you are carrying out the responsibility yourself, adding to your work load and underminding the faith in your subordinate.

INTERPERSONALCONCEPTS

Concept#1: Control and awareness of ones behaviors are important in selling ideas and receiving cooperation.

The executive must select and be aware of his behaviors at all times. Position of the eyes, tone of voice, a smile on the face, all nonverbal and verbal behavior affects how those around you will respond. Therefore you must match your behavior with the goal you want to accomplish, as well as with the person you want to affect.

Concept#2: People are valuable resources which should be nurtured so they may nurture you.

The most striking impression from the interviews were the importance each person placed on the human resources around them. As one person stated, when asked to respond concerning conflicts on his staff, "Never close doors, no matter what the situation.". Several of those interviewed kept files of persons which could be contacted as resources when problems arose in various areas. The idea being that every person is potentially a solution to a problem and as such their friendship should be nutured.

PERSONALCONCEPTS

Concept#1: The key word in dress and behavior is conservative.

Appearances and behaviors are very important to success in executive positions. A person must dress conservative so that the proper impression is given to the client. The clothes worn as well as the appearance of the individual should reflect the appearance of other administrators in the same position on another campus (one of the most important

things I've learned from this internship).

As I observed the various individuals I interviewed, I noticed they all wore basically the same clothes. Later I was told these were the "uniforms" of administration and were very important in making impressions.

Concept#2: Your appearance and behaviors should be implied by your goals.

Every person I interviewed I asked how they handled conflicts with individuals on their staff. Without exception they all stated it depended upon the individual, some requiring one response, others requiring another. You had to match your behavior to the individual to which you were responding and to the outcome you desired.

Concept#3: Though you respond, dress and behave according to the results you want to accomplish, one should always be honest in actions and ethical in their decisions.

I was very surprised to observe the honesty the various individuals I interviewed demonstrated. I didn't expect to get responses to some questions or to get the answers that I did for others. It seems that each of the individuals were beyond the point of worrying about their position because of what they said, which speaks highly of their confidence and UNL leadership.

Concept#4: To be successful in an executive position a person must be committed to the mission of that position.

Because of the nature of an executive position and the responsibilities attached to it, one must be more than just a person following procedure. They must be motivated on a personal level. There will be a murrid of unpleasant tasks to accomplish, uncomfortable situations to endure and unpopular decisions to be made yet they will have to be accomplished. Without committment it would be difficult to endure.

CONCLUSION

This internship has provided the reinforcement needed to decide upon my future career in higher education. I feel that I do have the talents, skills and understandings needed to become successful at the executive level.

Though I may possess the traits necessary to be successful in an executive position, from my exit interview areas of needed refinement have been identified which will assist in obtaining an executive position.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From this experience I would suggest the following recommendations concerning possible future candidates:

Persons selected for this internship should have professional experience in similar positions. The novice should not be allowed to participate in this program since many of the principles involved could easily be misunderstood by the student who has not experienced certain situations. This internship should be used for those individuals who simply need the reinforcement which will give them confidence in their understandings.

The discussions throughout the internship were very valuable since they allowed interaction and clarification of the various experiences. They also facilitated a personal relationship development which allowed honest responses to be given in trust without the fear that what was discussed would leave the office, a very important aspect which effects the quality of the internship.

The intership was very effective and the writing of this paper served a valuable purpose in assisting in the synthesis of concepts which should be very valuable. I would recommend that future participants also be required to write an informal summary report, not just for academic purposes, but for organizing and clarifying their experiences into useful concepts, rather than just a group of unrelated thoughts and experiences.

This has indeed been a very meaningful experience which I would recommend very highly to those persons contemplating higher education as a career.